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*Pres Burns James M.*  
*See 4-01, 2 A Thousand Days*

# JFK: A MEMOIR AND MORE

**A THOUSAND DAYS:** John F. Kennedy in the White House. By Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. 1,087 pp. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. \$9.

By JAMES MacGREGOR BURNS

**M**ORE than any other people, perhaps, Americans like to leave issues to the "verdict of history." When some problem seems too opaque or some leader too inscrutable, we comfort ourselves with the thought that some day the historians will decide the merits of the case or take the final measure of the man. The trouble is that historians never come in with a final verdict; usually they are a hung jury. History is written by the survivors—but new generations bring new survivors.

The great historian combines the feel and immediacy of the participant with the distance and perspective of the critic who can put events in their broadest context, tap wide sources of data and judgment, and enjoy all the blessings of hindsight. He can accompany the main actors down the rutted, twisting road and feel—as well as record—the bumps and turns. But he can also step back, and, with his fellow historians as his jealous and watchful constituency, he can gain a perspective that sees a man and his era against the long prologue and epilogue of events.

Such a historian is rare. I doubt that Arthur Schlesinger Jr., with all his self-confidence, expected at the outset that he would write virtually a history of the Age of Kennedy. He describes his work as a "personal memoir by one who served in the White House during the Kennedy years," and one notes that he faithfully records his own background (O.S.S., Stevenson aide, etc.) and his own White House activities (mainly foreign relations) as well as his chief's. His work ends up, however,

as a remarkable feat of scholarship and writing, set in the widest historical and intellectual frame—and all the more astounding for having been written in something less than 18 months.

It is exciting in this book to see the historian take over, to see the mere chronicler of events, at first content to use his limited and staccato exposure to great events, give way to the scholar of contemporary America. Certainly Schlesinger's presence in the White House helped give him *Verstehen*—that quality of being able to feel one's way into complex situations and to know, if not how things were done, how they could not have been done.

Yet I think that Schlesinger's achievement is due less to his having been a member of the Kennedy White House than being a member of the Kennedy era. He shared with Kennedy, though from a different perspective, the worlds of Boston, Harvard, military power, state and national politics, convention rooms, Washington. Like Kennedy, he was born during World War I, came of age in the Great Depression, knew, admired and criticized the New Deal,

rejected many of the old liberal stereotypes, suffered through the platitudes of the Eisenhower years and embraced the politics of modernity.

In this long volume Schlesinger has caught both the sweep and the ferment of the thousand days. He has chronicled Kennedy's long and skillful nomination campaign, the battle with Nixon, the feverish preparations for office, the scintillating inaugural days, and then the burdens of power—Latin America, Berlin, Southeast Asia, Africa, and always Moscow and Peking; and at home, economic recovery, the civil rights revolution, the fight with Big Steel, and all the rest. Nor does he ignore the disappointments—the burning humiliation after the Bay of Pigs, the frustrations on Capitol Hill, and the immovability—as Schlesinger sees it—of the bureaucracy in general and of the State Department very much in particular.

The chronicle is fresh, vivid and informative, but what the historian has done is to re-create the historical, political and personal context in which the events take place. He reaches back into the Truman and Eisenhower years to dissect the web

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